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South-South cooperation for development

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Draft report

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Summary of thematic discussion

1. On 1 June 2005, the High-level Committee held a thematic discussion on the role of South-South cooperation in realizing the Millennium Development Goals. The topic was addressed in a keynote speech by the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs and by three clusters of expert panellists. The first cluster considered the theme "Poverty and hunger reduction: science, technology and innovation"; the second cluster considered the themes "HIV-AIDS", "Child and maternal health" and "Women and the Millennium Development Goals"; and the third cluster considered the themes "Water and sanitation" and "Improving the lives of slum-dwellers".

2. The Under-Secretary-General, referring to the work of Argentinean economist Raul Prebisch (whose ground-breaking work led to the first United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the founding of the Group of 77 in 1964), described the background of cooperation among developing countries. The pattern of economic relations dominated by the developed countries had kept developing countries from building the basic infrastructural links with each other necessary for the growth of trade, investment and technical cooperation. A political process to remedy that situation had been under way since the 1950s, with pioneering efforts by Latin American and Caribbean countries. Despite economic crises, those efforts had continued within the Andean Group, the Caribbean Community and the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR). Those efforts had led to increasing trade flows but the process remained "fragile".

3. In Latin America, about 15 per cent of the overall trade of most countries was conducted within the region. Trade in manufactures among developing countries had increased to nearly 50 per cent of their total trade, but if final market orientation was taken into account the percentage was lower. Africa had lagged behind other developing country regions in the development of reciprocal trade, one reason being that most countries of the region were exporters of primary commodities to

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developed countries. Most of the growth of intra-developing country trade had been in manufactures.

4. Speaking of new opportunities that had emerged but not widely recognized, the Under-Secretary-General pointed to the areas of finance and technology. There were interesting examples of financial cooperation in the Arab Fund, in the Andean Group's "Plata Fund" and in the Chang-Mai initiative of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations plus China, Japan and the Republic of Korea (ASEAN+3). These were efforts to create institutions and mechanisms entirely owned and managed by developing countries. He looked forward to the time when regional banks would be similarly owned and capitalized by developing countries.

5. Technical cooperation among developing countries was well advanced but technological cooperation was also becoming important. A number of developing countries had advanced technological capacities, including in the biosciences. In fact, some developing countries now had capabilities more advanced than that of developed countries.

6. In introducing the panel members, the Moderator of the panel discussion, the Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Africa to the Secretary-General, said that it was important to focus on what developing countries could do for themselves and what must be done by the international community to support their efforts. He pointed out the need to have policies that addressed economic and social concerns in an integrated manner.

7. The two presenters of the theme "Poverty and hunger reduction: science, technology and innovation" were Chandrika Bahadur, of the United Nations Millennium Project, and Dato Yee-Cheong Lee, President of the World Federation of Engineering Organizations.

8. Ms. Bahadur said that South-South Cooperation was "embedded" within each of the Millennium Development Goals. Because some developing countries had made significant progress towards the Goals, there were rich opportunities for cooperation. There were no magic bullets for achieving the Goals; each case of cooperation would have to be approached on the basis of prevailing realities. A combination of technical cooperation, financing investment and other inputs would be necessary. To discover the right combination, it would be necessary to ask what each country needed to do to achieve the Goals by 2015 and then work backward to the present. It was also necessary to work up from the community level in deciding inputs. Where people were unable to pay for services needed to realize the Goals, they should not have to pay. South-South sharing of experience and information could be a factor in shaping national strategies, and where regional action was necessary cooperation could involve technical cooperation and financing of projects.

9. Mr. Lee reviewed the wide range of South-South actions that were possible and necessary to achieve the Goals. South-South cooperation could play a role in everything from research to application of technology, from training personnel to supporting entrepreneurs. There was no time for fundamental scientific research, but it was necessary to find out what was best suited for any situation. Building infrastructure was a basic need, one that South-South cooperation could support with technical support and financing. He noted that Brazil, China, India and Mexico had agreed to provide 40 post-doctoral fellowships each through the Third World Academy of Sciences.

10. During the discussion, the representative of Brazil said that high priority action for poverty reduction was the declared policy of his Government. He noted several successful examples of national action and international cooperation. In cooperation with India and South Africa, Brazil had launched the "IBSA initiative" to fund anti-poverty efforts in other developing countries. In cooperation with a number of other developing countries, Brazil was planning to put concrete proposals before the forthcoming Second South Summit (12-16 June, Doha, Qatar). Domestically, the Government had four major programmes to fight poverty. One was the zero hunger programme, which sought to attack the roots of poverty by creating employment and generating income. Another programme, implemented in partnership with NGOs and community groups, supplemented the nutrition of nursing mothers. A third programme provided income to mothers whose children were in school and had pushed primary school enrolment to 98 per cent. Finally, Brazil had a successful programme on HIV-AIDS. All four programmes were being used as models in other developing countries. To scale up these efforts so as to realize the Millennium Development Goals would require financial assistance.

11. The President of the World Trade University, which is located in Canada, said that his organization had been launched during the Third United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries as a global public-private partnership mechanism to help build professional capacities in the South for the promotion of intra-South trade and investment. Its primary beneficiaries are young entrepreneurs and trade-related professionals, especially in least developed countries. The University is already in the process of establishing campuses in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

12. The three panellists on the themes "HIV-AIDS", "Child and maternal health" and "Women and the Millennium Development Goals" were Dr. Josh Ruxin of the Earth Institute and the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University in New York, Dr. Allan Rosenfield, Dean of the Mailman School of Public Health, and Yassine Fall of the United Nations Millennium Project. The panellists concurred that hugely beneficial action could be taken immediately if appropriate policies were adopted and the necessary capacities developed.

13. Dr. Ruxin presented a visual representation of a person afflicted with AIDS, showing the dramatic difference wrought by treatment with antiretroviral drugs. The photographs could be seen as a poster throughout Africa, he said, but the patient portrayed was Haitian. The message of hope had crossed many borders but the reality was different from country to country. Many people continued to die for lack of treatment. The focus on abstinence as a response to AIDS was emphasized as counterproductive. He noted that South-South cooperation could respond to these issues on a political level by advocating that Governments focus on the policies needed to deal with existing realities, ranging from drug pricing and availability to training and remuneration of medical personnel.

14. Dr. Rosenfield said that the current maternal and neonatal death rates in poor countries were prevalent in Western countries a century ago. They had been reduced because of determined government policies. That this could be done in a developing country was clear in the example of Sri Lanka, where three decades of appropriate policies and practices had resulted in death rates comparable to those in developed countries. He noted several NGOs that were working in Afghanistan and sub-Saharan Africa that applied lessons learned from one country to others. There was no need for new science; what was known merely had to be applied.

15. Ms. Fall said that the policy focus on drugs in disease prevention should not distract attention from the importance of adequate nourishment and clean water in preserving health. In devising any strategy to reduce deaths from diseases and childbirth, policymakers should focus on the situations within each country. They should ensure that the very poor did not have to pay user fees for medical care. Poor expectant and nursing mothers were the least able to pay for care. She noted the need for action to compensate African countries for the brain drain, which took so many trained medical personnel away from their countries to serve affluent populations in developed countries.

16. In the discussion that followed the presentations, the President of the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation, Ambassador Eladio Loizaga, asked what specific role South-South cooperation could play in improving the existing situation. The representative of Ghana raised a number of questions along the same lines. The response was that developing countries should set the right policies and ensure adequate support for medical care. Dr. Rosenfield said it was a "matter of deciding that women's lives are worth saving". He noted the need to address the issue of international debt of the poor countries and to engage the private sector in providing care.

17. The presenters on the themes "Water and sanitation" and "Improving the lives of slum-dwellers" were Roberto Lenton of the International Research Institute for Climate Prediction at Columbia University; Pietro Garau of the Department of Architecture of the University of Rome, and Salil Shetty of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals Campaign.

18. Mr. Lenton underlined the importance of pricing policies in the supply of water and sanitation services. The principle that the poor should not have to pay for these services seemed obvious, but in reality they were paying much more than the affluent sections of developing countries because they were forced to buy from private vendors. Innovative solutions to inadequate infrastructure had come from Governments and civil society. South Africa had set a policy of providing free of cost 20 litres of water per person per day. Brazil had adopted in the 1980s a policy of "condominium" development of water and sanitation services in poor neighbourhoods. An Indian NGO had developed a flush toilet that was being used by 10 million people a day. In Ghana, an NGO was marketing "VIP toilets" — Ventilated Indented Pit latrines — for use in areas where there were no sanitation facilities. Mr. Garau made the point that South-South cooperation offered substantial potential for technical, financial and institutional "leapfrogging" of problems. He pointed out that cities were increasingly becoming home to larger numbers of the population in developing countries, underscoring the need to address the needs of new city dwellers. Mr. Shetty described the progress being made in the Millennium Development Goals Campaign, which had been launched at the January 2005 World Social Forum by President Lula of Brazil. Globally, NGOs in about 100 countries were engaged in the campaign.

19. In closing the session, the Moderator acknowledged the clear link between South-South cooperation and the measures required to meet the Millennium Development Goals. Many participants observed that the thematic discussion was timely in the context of the forthcoming Second South Summit to be held in Doha in June 2005 and the United Nations Millennium Declaration review summit to be held in September 2005.